

# Therapeutic Potencies of Traditional Ashanti Art Forms

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## ABSTRACT

Much attention has not been drawn to the study and documentation of the potencies of traditional Ashanti visual art forms although several attempts have been made to document some visual aspect of art use for therapeutic purposes. The purpose of the study is to identify and make accessible some of the traditional Ashanti Visual art forms used for restoration purposes. This will be materialized by proper documentation. The study provides information on the traditional means of using art for restoration among Ashanti and further review the current trend of art therapy in other to provide road map for merging them for effective implementation and accessibility. The researcher identify some visual art forms like Akuaba doll, Pots, Beads, Body art among others that were traditionally proved to have possessed special powers to restore. The potencies were manifested in psychological, emotional and mythical means

**Keywords:** therapeutic, curative, Ashanti tradition

## 1.0 Introduction.

Around the globe, from cradle to grave, man has been using art for diverse purposes. The arts including visual and performing are used in everyday life of humans (Sarpong, 1974). "We all die, the goal is not to live forever, the goal is to create something that will" (Palahniuk, 2011). Therefore 'art' is the creation of man that never dies and use as therapy to restore mankind to normality. Dickson (1969) asserts that therapy is derived from a Greek verb "therapeuim" which means "to take care of" while "therapeia" means "service and treatment". The use of art as an indicator or diagnostic instrument of mankind's inner conflicts in a therapeutic way began in the late nineteenth century. Naumburg (1950) wrote about mark Simons, a French psychiatrist who collected data on the personal dynamic of patients. Naumburg (1953) further writes about Molh, who in 1906 recognised that drawing as a means of expression once inner conflict and usage of art as curative measure.

Cole (1990) argues that, Africa also used art as therapy. Although the psychological role of art is difficult to document and prove, they are no less present. Art elicit more dramatically psychological responses in traditional Africa societies. Cole (1990) further opines that the therapeutic potencies in traditional Africa art forms are normally hidden from view. These potencies are however, tapped through the use of art forms for restoration. Ashanti's from Ghana, however, since time immemorial has also been tapping the power in art for rehabilitation purposes in order to adjust to their environment.

According to Norwood (2014), the ancient Ashanti migrated from the vicinity of the north-western Niger River after the fall of the Ghana Empire in the 13th century. Around the 13th century AD, the Ashanti and various other Akan peoples migrated into the forest belt of present-day Ghana and established small states in the hilly country around present-day Kumasi. Government of Ghana official Portal (2013) assert that Ashanti is an administrative region in Ghana, centrally located in the middle belt of Ghana. It lies between longitudes 0.15W and 2.25W, and latitudes 5.50N and 7.46N. The region shares boundaries with four of the ten political

Western region ethnic groups. It is believed that, it was through Okomfo Anokye's extraordinary supernatural powers that King Osei Tutu I founded the Ashanti Empire; as he is said to have commanded the Golden Stool to fall from "the heavens", the stool which, to this day, serves as the symbol of the spirit, unity and strength of the Ashantis (Government of Ghana official Portal, 2013). The present Ashanti King (Asantehene) Osei Tutu II, is a direct matrilineal descendant of Osei Tutu I.

## 2.0 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the research is geared towards tracing the history of traditional Ashanti art forms used for health restorative purposes and further document some visual art forms used for restoring various ailments. The study sought to achieve the following specific objectives:

1. To trace the history of Ashanti art therapy
2. To document some of the traditional Ashanti visual art forms used for therapeutic purpose

### **Research Questions**

- What are the therapeutic potencies in Ashanti ethnic visual art forms?
- In what way would the documentation of Ashanti visual art forms enhance its therapeutic practice?

## **2.0 Review of Literature**

### **2.1 Art Therapy in Traditional African Society**

Artistic lives and works of Africa revolved around social, political, economic, religious, psychological and aesthetic perspectives. Although the psychological roles of art are difficult to document and prove, they are no less present. Art objects and their situations may arouse people to responses such as fear, devotion, guilt, or confusion that are not assessable (Cole, 1990). Mask elicits more dramatic psychological responses in traditional Africa societies. "A shrine was erected by a man when his young son almost died shortly after birth. It includes a mother and child carving, ceramics vessel with medical water and medical plants to sustain the soul of the child". (Cole 1990, p.28) The powers in traditional Africa art forms are normally hidden from view. These powers are however, can be tapped through the use of art forms for restorations.

Imperato (1970) as cited in Cole (1990, p.65) says fruitfulness is a major theme in dances that metaphorically combines human, animal and agricultural processes and realms. A marriage without child does not last long in Africa. A proof of a woman's fertility, either by pregnancy or more often by the birth (and even survival) of a child, is necessary for sustaining the marriage. The mother-and-child theme is therefore as important in African life and thought as that of marriage. The exceptional sculpturally complex Yoruba shrine carving shown richly in content in relation (Cole, 1990). Probably made as votive gift for Eshu (Marriage couple) the trickster deity, the couple would remind the devotees of Eshus instigating role in human sexuality, fertility, procreation and marriage.

Cole (1990) Posit that, a great many spiritual agencies are invoked to promote healthy childbirth and most woman-and-child imagery is created to these ends at least indirectly. Many Baule woman-and-child carving owe their existence to a man facing difficulties in life, often but not exclusively having to do with his wife and children. A man might face problem of finding or keeping a wife or having children by his wife, or he might experience financial or other misfortune. Such individuals are said to be troubled by their other world lover, who desire more time and attention, including present (sacrifice) the diviner determines that an image- a woman with or without a child – should be made of this spirit. The man must feed it regularly, devote one specific night per week to this lover (rather than sleep with his real wife), and otherwise answer it demands. This placated, the other world spirit should stop disturbing the man, whose life then improve and effect become fecundity for marriage (Cole,1990). Lobi and related women keep amulets and other secret personal objects in small "shrine basket" (Cole & Rose, 1977).

Wikipedia (2013) asserted that, scarring on the abdomen and other parts of women in many tribes in Africa are used to denote a willingness to be a mother. Her ability to tolerate the pain of scarring was an indication of her emotional maturity and readiness to bear children. Among the recurrent formal qualities that can be found in African sculpture, scarification, along with hairstyles, is generally represented idealistically, implying its importance as a major aesthetic and medicinal cultural component. Among the Yoruba in Nigeria there is a "veritable connoisseurship" (Kerchache, 1988, p280), bestowed upon scarification patterns in sculpture. Not only are they perceived as aesthetically pleasing, they are also functional, for example its medicinal purposes. Permanent body markings emphasise fixed social, political and religious roles. Facial scarification in West Africa is used for identification of ethnic groups, families, individuals, but also to express personal beauty as much as its curative purposes among traditional Africa societies.

Scarification is also performed on girls to mark stages of the life process, such as puberty, marriage etc. They can assist in making them more attractive to men, as the scars are regarded as appealing to touch as well as to look at, but also as testimony that women will be able to withstand the pain of childbirth. The Tiv of Nigeria value women with raised scars as mates because they consider scarified women more sexually demanding and therefore, likely to bear more children. The Tiv claim the raised scars stay sensitive for many years and they produce erotic sensations in both men and

women when touched or stroked (Vogel,1986).

Precisely in Ghanaian traditional societies, like other traditional societies in Africa use art as means of curative purpose. Antubam (1963) opines that, in Wasa Ghanaian states, women who have ceased to bear children use yellow cloth. He further opines that some special beads known to Akans “bodom” (beads) are said to posse the power to breathe and reproduce. This implies that the women wear these beads for some time in their waist and in the process the beads render them fecundity. Antubam (1963; pg.163) posit that, traditionally the usage of akuaba doll is in fourfold:

- Akuaba as “fertility” symbol,
- Akuaba as “beauty” symbol,
- Akuaba as “children’s doll”,

Akuaba doll is generally carved in wood called “sɛsɛ”. It was then darkened with a preparation made up of “white of egg- raw, soot under a soup pot, and alkaline from potash of plantain peel, in which had been kept pieces of iron”. Antubam further position that, akuaba varies in form especially when it is made to be a fertility doll. The form is determined by the wishes of the father who makes it. Father who wishes to have a female child carve s Akuababere (a doll with indication of all the characteristics of a girl, this always has the oval or egg shaped head). A male child is represented with a rectangular head and named Akuabanini while a religious and wise child is shown with a circular head and called Akuabatene. Akuaba as a fertility symbol is geneally made by a husband for his barren wife. She bore it, played about with it in the day time, and slept with it in the night. She did all through her life, till she got a child, or else buried with it, when she died.

Antubam (1963) opine that, Akuaba as a beauty symbol, among the Wasa Akan Ghanaians, akuaba doll was bought by a husband whose wife continually brought forth ugly looking children. He saw to it that it had all the conceptions of beauty, for example, long neck, with rings on it, oval shape head, oval buttocks, oval calves, long toes, thin fingers, hairy eyebrows, and he presented to his wife, when she was pregnant.

Danquah (2008) asserts that, motherhood is the principal, if not the ultimate, end of marriage. Fertility for the girl is crucial, especially in the matrilineal societies, as to ensure that society will not die out. Barrenness then is the greatest calamity that can befall a Ghanaian woman. The ideal Ghanaian woman is one who combines “motherliness” with her motherhood.

Danquah (2008) further suggested that, Motherliness requires a woman to provide, by way of preparation, adequate food and shelter for own children and when necessary, for those of others and strangers as well. In some places in Ghana, deceased woman who is known to have been benevolent is bewailed as: “the woman who gives to both mother and child”. A cooking Pot which mystically serves as Grandmother is used to entertain strangers. The pot is placed on mighty tree with big branch laden with fruits. When children come to you, they fine something to eat. The one whose house is always filled with food always welcome children both in physical and spiritual realm. Danquah (2008) emphases that, to be childless is socially disastrous. Besides these however, the pregnant women fortifies themselves with what may be described as mystical medicine. In order to prevent witches, magicians, sorcerers and other evil powers from harming them or their children, they put themselves under the tutelage of some deity who protects them. The protection may come from talismans which the woman may wear around her waist, or amulets which she may wear around her wrists or hang on the doorpost of her house (Danquah, 2008).

Danquah (2008) further hypothesized that, the witches are said to feed on human flesh, witches normally through protracted illnesses, although the latter too may be the cause of sudden death. Therefore, it takes intervention of good magician or medicine man to use the potencies in art to thwarts the efforts of sorcerers and witches. Art in a form of doll, talisman and cloth are used to protect and prevent sorcerers and witches from harming them. Sickness brought by the witches and sorcerers in nature, in most often, art forms are used as curative purposes through medicine men to bring relieve to the patient.

Anthropologically, the fame of wooden doll cannot be downplaying for its curative purposes (Sarpong, 1974). Sarpong further stated that, a childless woman is given a doll (or two, one representing a girl, the other a boy). She carried the doll on her back. She expresses the wish of having her own children, the greatest blessing of the Ghanaian women. If she has two dolls, then her wish is that she may have children of both sexes. If she dies childless, the doll is buried with her. So the first purpose of the doll is mystically and symbolically to bring about fertility. Furthermore, the doll is also used religiously to ward off evil spirits. It is placed at the

outskirts of the village, the belief being that any evil spirit wanting to cause havoc will be repulsed by the doll (Sarpong 1974).

Sarpong (1974) further discussed that, for the above reasons the carver makes sure that the doll satisfies all or some of the physical qualities that in the Ghanaian's eye make for beauty or the ideal personality. He may exaggerate the characteristics of the different parts of the human body which are looked upon as beautiful or ideal in either of the two sexes. For example, in some tribes in Ghana, a man is considered to be handsome if his head is a bit rectangular in shape, he himself is reasonably tall and slender without being thin, and has rounded eyes, which are almost protruding. The girl or woman, however, is expected (if she is to be regarded as being beautiful) to have a somewhat oval head, she must be fleshly and smooth-skinned, majestically and graceful. That is why during initiation rites or nobility rites for girls, the novices are put on fattening diets that they may become attractive (Sarpong 1974).

### **3.0 Research Methodology**

#### **3.1 Research Design**

The researcher employed a case study design in the research. Case study is an ideal methodology when a holistic, in-depth investigation is needed (Feagin, 1991). Case studies are designed to bring out the details from the viewpoint of the participants by using multiple sources of data. According to Yin (1994) a case study is a comprehensive description and analysis of a single situation.

#### **3.2 Population of the Study, Sample and Sampling Procedure**

The study target population was 200 members from Ashanti region of Ghana. A sample size of 150 was chosen for the study. The sample size consists of the following strata groups from Ashanti Region: Chiefs-15, Opinion leaders (family heads, some Assembly members) - 20, Herbalists-17, Elders-25, Fetish priest-5, other Citizens-68, totalling 150. Purposive and stratified random sampling technique were used to aim at collecting views of chiefs, opinion leaders, traditionalists', and other concern citizens in the Ashanti region; therefore, the stratification was based on traditionalist point of view, elders and opinion leader's point of view. The respondents were selected from Manhyia palace and surrounding town and villages in the Ashanti Region.

#### **3.3 Sources of Data**

Basically, there are two main sources from which data was collected. These source of data collections include; Primary, and secondary sources of data.

#### **3.4 Data Collection Instruments**

Instruments for data collection for this study consisted of semi-structured interviews and questionnaires. Data was collected through personal interaction between the researcher and the respondent/interviewee. Interviews and questionnaires were designed to gather data from the targeted groups.

#### **3.5 Data Analysis**

Data analysis plan for this study was determined by the two main types of data gathered. They are interview and questionnaire data. Narrative analysis was used in analysing the history part of the data. Data were manually transcribed by the researcher base on the objectives and the research question design of the study. The transcribed data were placed under the appropriate classifications, interpreted and analysed qualitatively to reflect the research questions and objectives of the study. The collected data from questions were statistically analysed, using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences software (SPSS 20). Representations like tables and charts were used to ensure easy and quick interpretation of data. Responses were expressed in percentages.

#### **3.6 Study Area**

According to Norwood (2014), the ancient Ashanti migrated from the vicinity of the north-western Niger River after the fall of the Ghana Empire in the 13th century. Ashanti is an administrative region in Ghana, centrally located in the middle belt of Ghana. It lies between longitudes 0.15W and 2.25W, and latitudes 5.50N and 7.46N. The region shares boundaries with four of the ten political regions, Brong-Ahafo in the north, Eastern region in the east, Central region in the south and Western region in the South west. Most of the region's inhabitants are Ashanti people, one of Ghana's major ethnic groups.

## 4.0 Results and Discussions

### 4.1 What are the Therapeutic Potencies in Ashanti Ethnic Visual Art Forms?

The aim of this research question was to identify visual art forms as well as its potency for therapeutic purposes. Interviewee one, is a fetish priest at Asante Agona. She postulated that, her job was more of spiritual but work through physical objects to administer restoration to some of her client. *“After consulting the oracle any herb or object mentioned by the deity to use to administer restoration is what I used”* (Verbatim Comments of a priest). On the case of using artefacts to restore ailment, Nana: as she is called, stated that ‘Akuaba doll is an age-long artefact known to Ashanti’s for its restoration purposes. *Akuaba doll had been called on by the deity several times to use as element for restoration but much is rested on the soul of the client* (Verbatim expression of the priest). On pot, the priest discussed that; sometimes it is served as ‘Agyinaeζ’ (symbol) for the deity. Pot can be used in several ways. Pot, when placed at the entrance of the shrine is used to welcome good fortune; the rain water in the pot is used to bath Children with convulsion. It is also used to boil medicines which cannot be boiled with any other bowls. On the account of the number of clients received daily, she stated that, lately, “I used to attend to at least twelve clients a day but recently, sometimes none”, she said. Acculturation was blamed for the happened.

Interviewee two, a chief from Kumawu traditional area stated through interview that, *“art forms had been with us since the origination of Ashanti Kingdom”* (verbatim). Nana further explained that, Akuaba doll had being chief among all the art works used by the Asantes for restoration purposes. Akuaba doll is traditionally used to induce fertility through caring and currying of the doll, Akuaba is also used as beauty symbol. The interviewee two also made mentioned of the use of beads by Ashanti ladies which helped retained fertility among Ashanti women. He further postulated that, some carved images like effigy given to twin babies were used to help protect them from evil attacks.

An interview with a renowned sculptor at Kumasi Centre for Culture unravelled that, the secret that has kept him going despite every difficulty in life is the art work he keeps doing. Even though he is a disable, he is always cheerful.

*The art rehabilitated me in diverse ways, when I am stress up; in line of doing my work (sculpting) I become relief. Sometimes, when I have scuffle with my wife or neighbours and become dejected in life, what helps to restore me back is the art works. This becomes feasible by admiring some works, after achieving resemblance in portrait, or finishing some tormented works. All these help me to forget every entanglement and keep me focus. I have been able to achieve this feat regardless of my physical condition, because this job gives me money and also motivates and heals me as well* (Verbatim expression of a sculptor).

This attests to the fact that Ashanti visual art forms have the potencies to restore people in health. He claimed to know a white woman who had visited cultural centre and upon explaining the Akuaba doll to her, she bought it and sent it away. In actual fact the woman was having problems with conception. After a year she called back and attested that, she had gotten her own child by following the instruction of caring and carrying the doll. It is a belief and psychological preparedness he said.

Out of the 10 interviewees interviewed, 8 said, Akuaba doll is an art form used for therapeutic purposes and reiterated that, its potency cannot be over emphasised. Furthermore, they opined that, the potency in the doll could be realized in a form of psychological, emotional and mythical forms. Individually, they mentioned other varieties of Ashanti visual art forms like pot, scarification, beads, and body painting as art forms used for therapy and confirm their potencies based on personal witnesses given.

An interview with a 90 year old herbalist, confirmed the positive impact of the potency of visual art forms of Ashanti. She claimed that, *“my father was herbalist and traditionalist who used diverse visual art forms of Ashanti’s for curative purposes”*. She confirmed that, although she is no more using those art forms in her curing processes because of her religious affiliation, but the positive impact of it cannot be overlooked. She recounted a number of incidents she had experienced in which art had been used to restore humanity. The use of visual art forms for restoration has been linked with paganism which has nowadays retired its usage. She mentioned pot- carvings like mother and child, akuaba doll, stool for twin brothers, some special cloths with unique symbols, beads which women adore, are mostly used for restoration and its impact can be confirmed positively.

Sarpong (1974) discussed that; the fame of wooden doll cannot be downplayed for its curative purposes. What he said attest to the positivity of the impact of art therapy among Ashantis. The inference from the study unravel that, the use of art for restoration has been positive among Ashantis' since time immemorial.

In addition to these interviews, questionnaires were also administered to solicit data and these are analysed below:

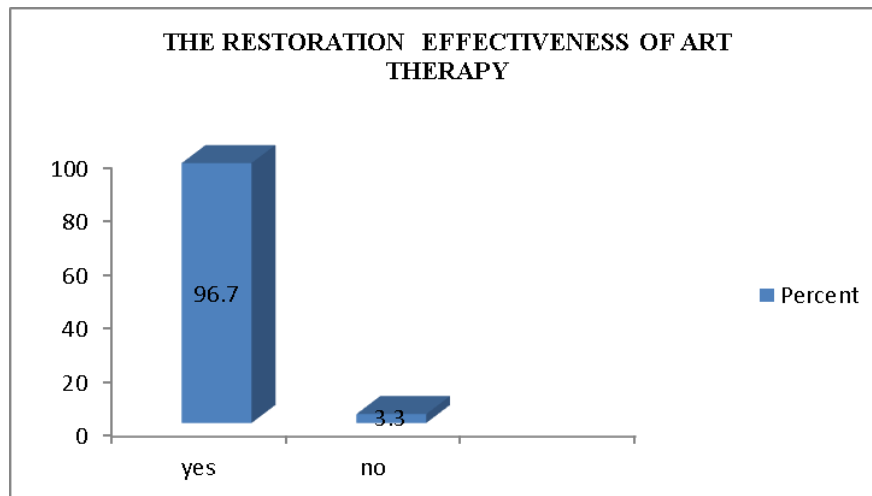


Figure 1: Restoration Effectiveness

Source: Field Data, 2013/2014

Figure 4.1 represents restoration effect of art therapy among Ashanti's people. The majority (96.7%) of the respondents said 'yes' while 3.3% of the total respondents said 'no'. This is in line with Heidegger (1960) assertion that, the process, the product, the handling as well as admiration of art work makes something happen; and that is restoration. It can therefore, be inferred from the result that, the use of art for restoration among the Ashanti peoples have been effective.

Further analysis in support of the potency in Ashanti ethnic visual art forms are as follows. figure 4.2 below present the reports and discussions.

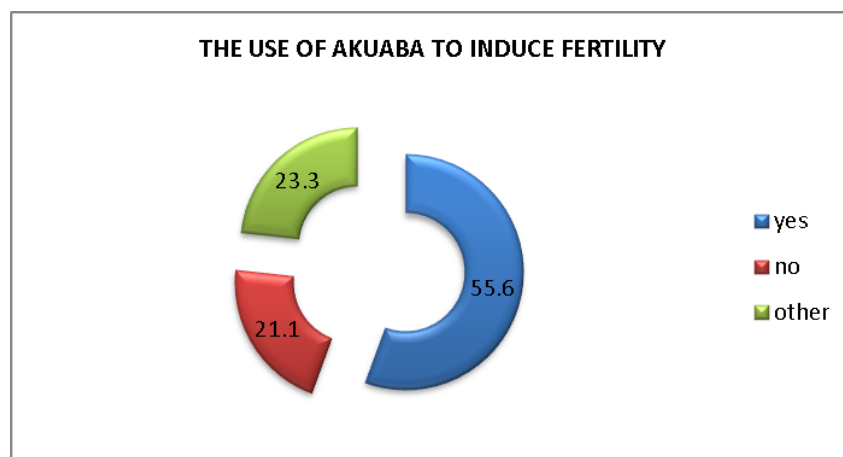


Figure 4.2: Akuaba to Induce Fertility

Source: Field Data, 2013/ 2014

From the questionnaire study, 55.6% of the respondent's questionnaire said yes, 23.3% of the respondents were indifferent while 21.1% of the total respondents said no. Annor et al (2011) opined that, the origin of



Akuaba doll comes from the story of a woman named “Akua” who could not get pregnant and went to a local diviner or priest and commissioned the carving of a small wooden doll. They continued that, she carried and cared for the doll as if it was her own child, feeding it, bathing it and so on. The story continued that, soon the people in the village started calling it “Akua” “Ba” – meaning “Akua’s child”, since “ba” means child. She soon became pregnant and her daughter grew up with the doll.

Sarpong (1974) further re-iterated that, the fame of wooden doll cannot be downplayed for its curative purposes. A childless woman is given a doll (one or two, one representing a girl, the other a boy). She carries the doll on her back. She expresses the wishes of having her own children, the greatest blessing of the Ghanaian women. If she has two dolls, then her wish is that she may have children of both sexes. If she dies childless, the doll is buried with her. So the first purpose of the doll is mystically and symbolically to bring about fertility. From the study and some views from authorities, it can be inferred that, Akuaba doll was used to induce fertility.

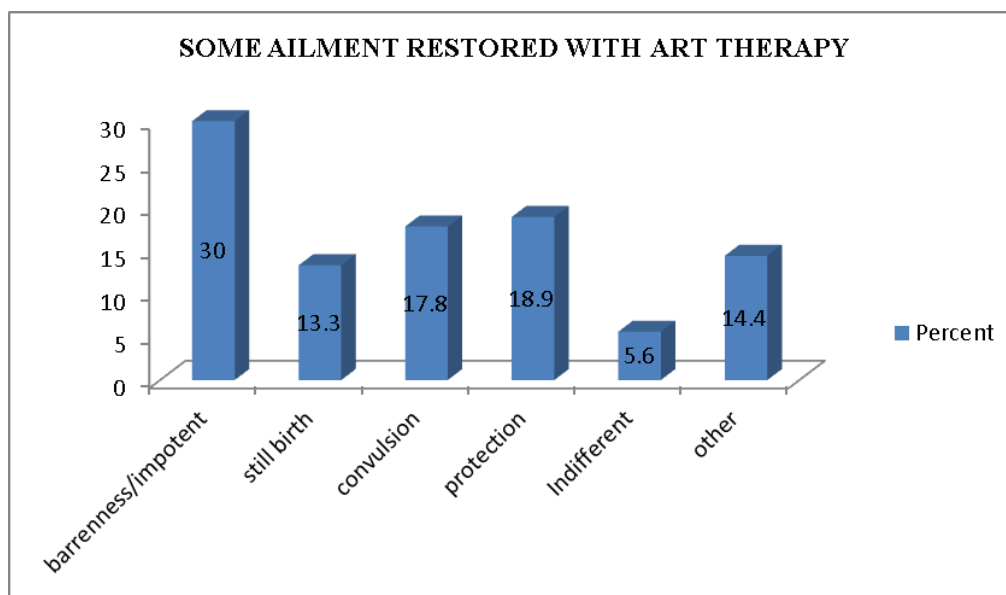


Figure 4.3: Some Ailment Restored With Art Therapy

Source: Field Data, 2013/ 2014

Figure 4.3 also presents analysis on some ailments restored with visual art forms among Ashanti’s. From the figure, 30% of the respondents were barren or impotent, 13.3% represented still birth, 17.8% of the respondents represented convulsion, 18.9% for protection, 5.6% were indifferent while 14.4% out of total number represent others.

Antubam (1963) opines that, some special beads known to Akans as “bodom” are said to possess the power to breathe and reproduce. This implies that the women wear these beads for some time in their waist and in the process the beads helped rendered them fertile.

A cooking Pot which mystically serves as Grandmother is used to entertain strangers. The pot is placed on a mighty tree with big branch laden with fruits. When children come to you, they find something to eat. The one whose house is always filled with food always welcome children both in physical and spiritual realm. (Danquah, 2008).

Besides these, the pregnant women fortified themselves with what may be described as mystical medicine. In order to prevent witches, magicians, sorcerers and other evil powers from harming them or their children, they put themselves under the tutelage of some deity who protects them. The protection may come from talismans

which the woman may wear around her waist, or amulets which she may wear around her wrists or hang on the doorpost of her house (Danquah, 2008)

Furthermore, art form like doll and pot are also used religiously to ward off evil spirits. It is placed at the outskirts of the village, the belief being that any evil spirit wanting to cause havoc will be repulsed by the doll or the pot (Sarpong 1974).

(Sarpong 1974) asserts that, among many tribes in Ghana when a woman loses several babies in succession, it is believed that it is the same child who intentionally keeps coming and going. This is especially so if the baby is still – born or dies at birth. To stop such a child from his ‘bad behaviour’ the baby who is born next is given any name by those present at birth. They were either given funnier or uglier names. The baby then feels ashamed to go back. Furthermore, he stated that, art in a form of body art comes in to rescue the situation; such babies may be marked on the cheek or around the lips to indicate that they have been ‘enslaved’.

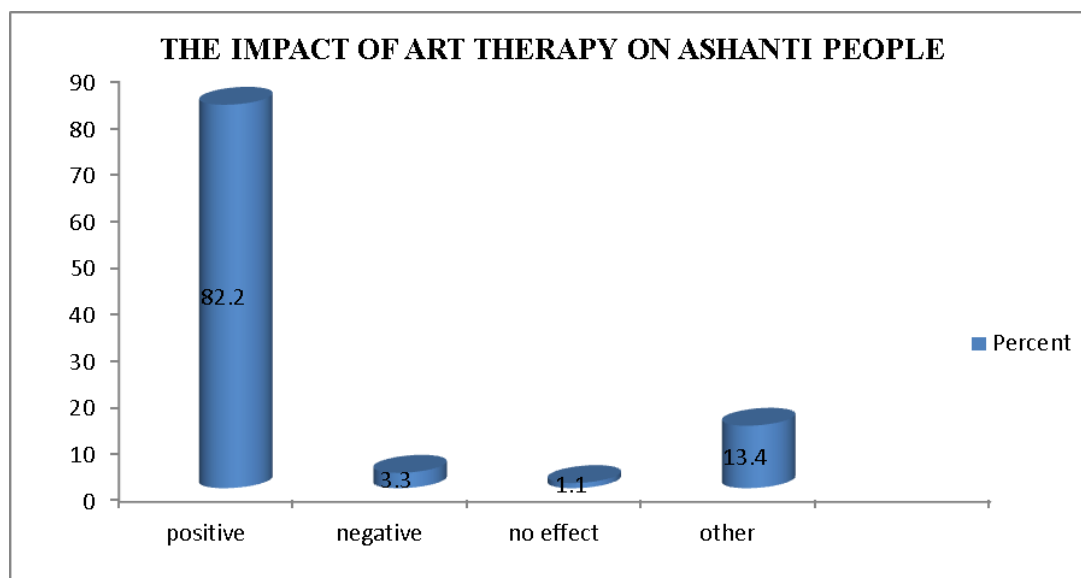


Figure 4.4 The Impact of Art Therapy on Ashanti.

Source: Field Data, 2013/ 2014

Figure 4.4 is the representation of the impact of therapeutic potencies of visual art forms on the Ashanti people. From the figure, the majority of respondents (82.2%) claimed that art therapy has a positive impact on Ashanti people while 3.3% of the respondents claimed that art therapy has a negative impact on Ashanti people, 1.1% claimed that art therapy has no effect while 13.4% were indifferent. From the respondents' responses, it could be inferred that, there are some potencies in Ashanti visual art form for restoration.

#### 4.2 In what ways would the documentation of Ashanti visual art forms enhance its therapeutic practice?

Interviewee four is a retired teacher and herbalist. He postulated that, the saying by some school of thought that, our forefathers did not know God is erroneous. He stated that, long before the advent of Christianity, our forefathers were using certain artistic symbol called “Nyame Akuma” (God axe symbol) together with traditional pot to administer restoration among Ashanti. *“The God’s axe symbol was put in pot and placed on triad tree in front of some houses which was used to cure convulsion”* (Verbatim expression of a retired teacher and herbalist). “I know a woman who was finding it difficult to bring forth in this town and through the use of Akuaba doll, she later became pregnant and gave birth”, personal testimony by the interviewee four. The retired teacher, asserted that, Ashanti’s used various art forms in diverse ways to help themselves, for example, beads, textiles, carved objects etc. This infer that, by documenting these happenings and the artefact used, would help make it accessible to the future generation and the present as well, which will bring some sort of relief to the people.



The interviewee five, a herbalist, stated that, *“the use of Akuaba doll to induce fertility is a psychological inducement”* (verbatim expression). He explains that, when several medications fail, Akuaba doll is given to the barren woman to be used as a symbol of her own child. This he said would take the mind off from stress, anxiety, the husband and every trauma as the akuaba makes her busy and helps her to become fertile. *“I did not believe that there is any spiritual power in the doll but it is a psychological inducement”*. (Verbatim expression of a herbalist).

The interviewee three, the veteran Sculptor who has worked for almost thirty (30) years at Kumasi cultural centre said, *“the use of Akuaba doll is based on the belief and psychological preparedness on the part of barren woman”* (verbatim expression). He concluded that, the use of art works for restoration purposes is more of belief and psychological preparedness rather than something to do with magic.

An interviewee, a chief curator at Manhyia palace, an author of four books to his credit and also retired educationist postulated that, the use of Akuaba doll to induce fertility among the Ashanti's is real. He said, there were no spiritual powers in the doll but rather it was based on a belief and psychological warfare. I have had an encounter with so many people who have conceived through the use of Akuaba doll. They bath it, carry it at the back, give it tender care and in the end had babies ( verbatim).

*“Akuaba varies in form especially when it is made to be a fertility doll. The form is determined by the wishes of the father who makes it. Father who wishes to have a female child carve Akuababere (a doll with indication of all the characteristics of a girl, this always has the oval or egg shaped head). A male child is represented with a rectangular head and named Akuabanini while a religious and wise child is shown with a circular head and called Akuabatene. Akuaba as a fertility symbol is generally made by a husband for his barren wife. The same processes are applied to women who wish to have beautiful and wise children alike. It all depends on the type of Akuaba doll you carried and cared for”* (verbatim expression of a chief curator).



Akuaba doll as beauty symbol  
 Akuaba doll as fertility symbol (female)



Akuaba doll as fertility symbol

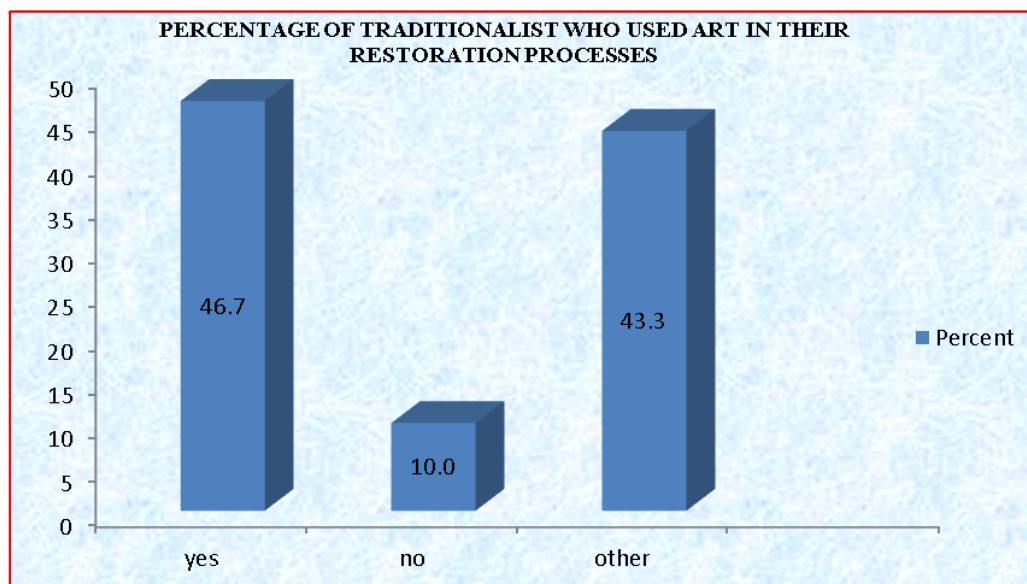


**Plate 1:** Akuaba doll in Used (as fertility symbol)

**Plate 2:** Akuaba doll in Used (as fertility symbol)

Source; field data

In addition to these interviews answering this research question, questionnaires were also administered to solicit data and these are analysed and presented below.



**Figure 4.5:** Traditionalist Respondents

Source: Field Data, 2013/ 2014

Figure 4.5 represents the traditionalist respondents on the use of art for therapeutic purposes.

Majority of the respondent's questionnaires infer that most traditionalists (46.7%) used art forms to administer restoration. Those who do not have idea on the use of art for therapeutic purpose represented 43.3%, while 10% represented those who knew the use of art but for some reasons do not use it to administer restoration. From the data, it is obvious that majority of traditionalists in Ashanti region used art to administer restoration. It is inferred that, the Ashanti people still clinch to traditions as handed over by ancestors. Even though modernity has

changed things by way of refining it to suit today's activities but, the cores can be still traced. For instance, the use of visual art forms to administer restoration by traditionalists among Ashanti people is still in force and assessed by many. The 43.3%, although traditionalists, do not use visual art forms to administer restoration. The data shows that they are ignorant and their views were indifferent to the data of the study. Also the 10% of the respondents who represented no category on the chat were those who knew the use of visual art forms for restoration but their religious background made them frown at it completely. Furthermore, they linked the used of art for restoration to fetishism.

Cole (1990) argues that, Africa in no exception also use art as therapy. Although the psychological role of art is difficult to document and prove, they are no less present. Art elicit more dramatically psychological responses in traditional Africa societies. It can be inferred from the study that, even though art therapy is used by the Ashanti's, it is still not accessible to many. From the study, it could also be inferred that, education is needed on the part of traditionalist to demystify the use of visual art forms that has been linked to fetishism among Ashanti peoples.

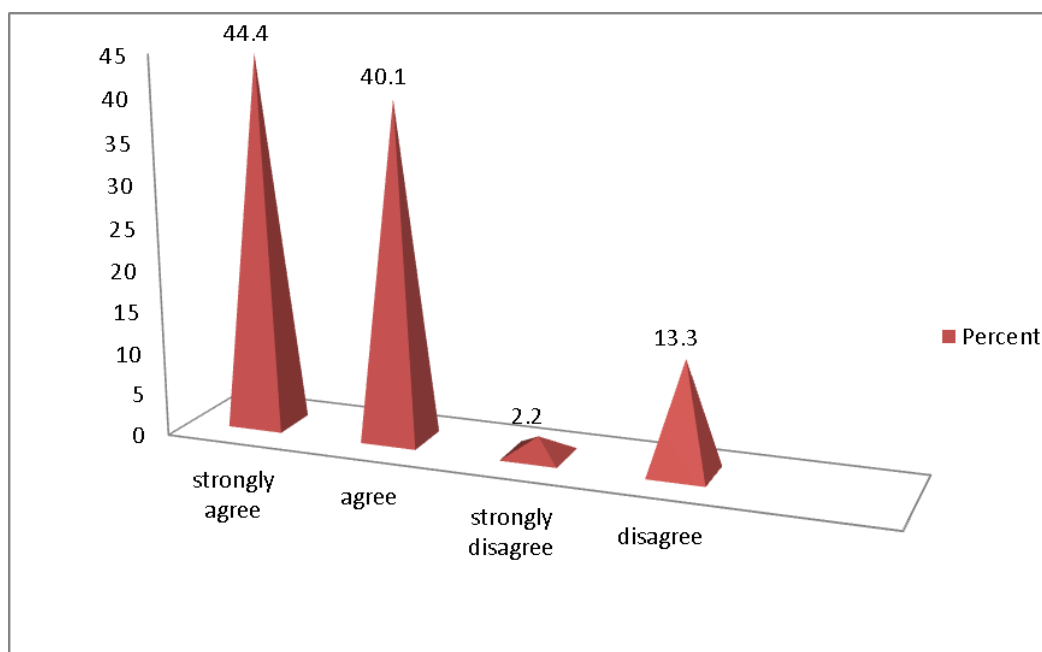


Figure 4.6: Art Therapy since Time Immemorial

Source: Field Data, 2013/ 2014

Figure 4.6 represents respondents' opinion on the period that art therapy has been with Ashantis' but never had proper documentation for accessibility to all. From the respondent's data, 44.4% strongly agreed that art therapy has been with Ashantis' since time immemorial, 40.1% also agreed to the claim, 13.3% disagreed while 2.2% of the total respondents strongly disagreed to the claim that art therapy has been with Ashanti's since time immemorial.

Malchiodi (1998) attests that, although art was in an existence but it was Hill, who had discovered the therapeutic benefits of drawing and painting while recovering from tuberculosis. The value of art therapy lay in 'completely engrossing the mind as well as the fingers and in releasing the creative energy of the frequently inhibited patient' (Hill, 1948: 101–102). This, Hill suggested, enabled the patient to 'build up a strong defence against his misfortunes' (Hill, 1948: 103)." Art therapy began when Hill, recovering from tuberculosis in a sanatorium, suggested artistic work to his fellow inpatients. That began his artistic work with patients, which was documented in 1945 in his book, *Art Versus Illness*. It is in the same way that, art therapy had been with Ashanti's unknowingly but rediscovered by the use of Akuaba doll as stated by (Sarpong 1974). From the study, it can be inferred that, although, there is no proper documentation of the potencies of

visual art forms used for therapeutic purposes, its existence from time immemorial cannot be downplayed. Therefore, proper documentation can enhance its effectiveness through accessibility and usage procedure.

The usage of Akuaba doll among Ashanti's peoples to induce fertility is presented in figure 4.7 below. From the study (70.6%) of respondents represented those who cared for the Akuaba doll, 15.6% represented those who carried the Akuaba doll, and 9.3% represented "others". While 4.5% represent those who worshipped the doll.

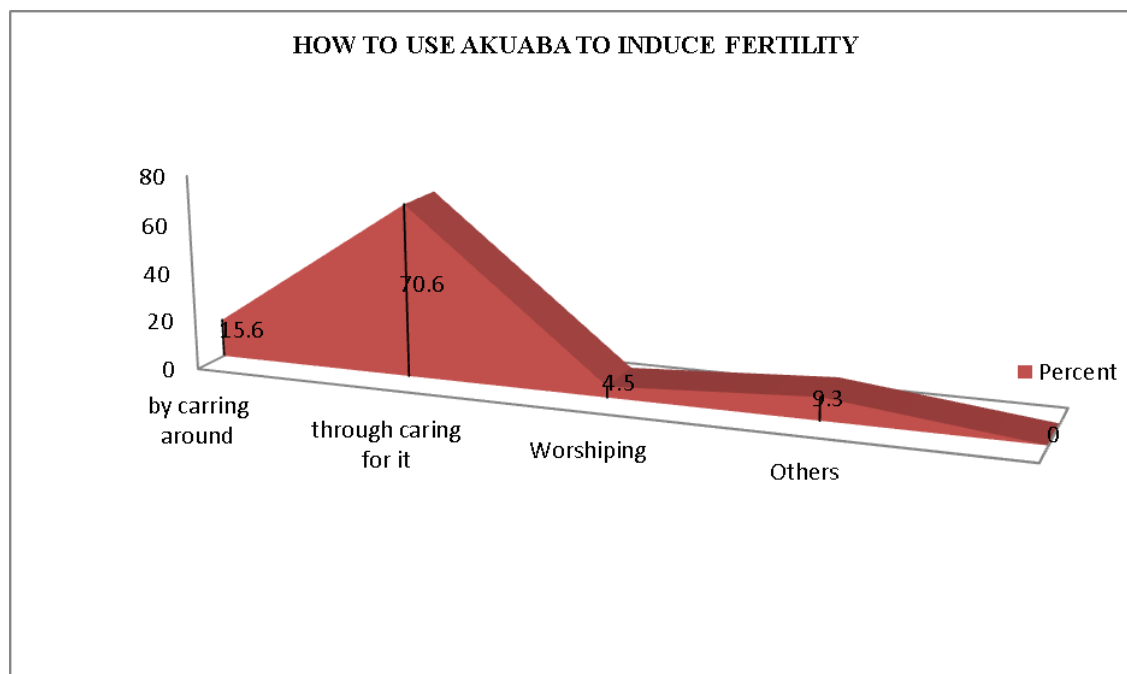


Figure 4.7: How to Induce Fertility with Akuaba Doll

Source: Field Data, 2013/ 2014

Sarpong (1974) mentioned that, the women carried the doll on their back to render them fecundity. Annor I. et al (2011) also supported the assertion by saying that, the woman carried and care for the doll as if it was her child, feeding it, bathing it and so on. He continued that, by so doing the woman becomes fertile and gives birth. From the study, majority of the respondents were those who used Akuaba doll to induce fertility, then 70.6% and 15.6% respectively of the respondents supported (Sarpong, 1974) and Annor I. et al (2011) claim that, the fertility comes through carrying and caring for the Akuaba doll. 4.5% digressed little from the authorities by giving different dimension of the usage of Akuaba doll to induce fertility. They said that, fertility comes through worshipping the doll.

Malchiodi (1998) hypothesized that, art therapy is a hybrid discipline based primarily on the fields of art and psychology. It seems clear that this pairing is as old as human society itself, having occurred repeatedly throughout our history across place and time. The perception of Heidegger clarifies that, the process, the product, the handling as well as admiration of art work makes something happens. (Heidegger 1960). This can be inferred that through carrying and caring for the doll, it will take away their mind from stress, anxiety, and trauma associated with barrenness and effectively relax their system and further prepare them for procreation. Through documentation, all those who has interest in accessing traditional restoration, can be made possible through reading.

### 4.3 Some Discovered Visual Art Forms Used for Restoration among Ashanti's

#### 4.3.1 Unity Bowl



Plate 3. Unity Bowl (Manhyia palace)

Source: Field Data, 2013/ 2014

The bowl was originally made by Kwame Amoah, a ceramics trained artist. The shape is modelled after conventional indigenous dinner bowl used for serving soup to the wealthy. The bowl generally exhibit wide mouth and broad protruding bellies in a two –tier construction. The cylindrical ringed necks of the Akuaba emerge from the mid-section of the bowl, leaning gently backwards to rest the flat disk shape heads on the rims to form part of the mouth of the pot or bowl and also to serve as handle to the bowl.

An interview with Mr Justice Brobbey, the director of Manhyia museum unravelled the mystery of Unity bowl in Manhyia palace in Ashanti region of Ghana. 'This is the family bowl he said; this object is very symbolic, very important in the history of Ashanti people'. The Ashanti's, for the sake of unity constructed their houses in such a way that each house could accommodate between two or three families together in the same house.

It is undeniable fact that "fufu" is the most stable food for the Ashanti's. Therefore, during the evening meals, assuming four (4) people were living in the same house, they will eat from the same bowl. The three heads on the bowl represents those eating together symbolically. It is called two or three heads are better than one. So that after eating or enjoying the food, if any one of them has any problem or challenges in their marriage, the person will bring it and the rest will help him to solve the problem. Also for instance, if four (4) people are eating together and one of them decides not to eat with the group or the group decide not to eat with him it means, he either has a problem with the group or the group has a problem with him. Immediately, the elders will call them for peaceful settlement. That was a nice way of using artefact to identify and solve problem among them said by the curator at Manhyia palace. This enforces togetherness among the Ashanti people. The men were eating together in the bowl, the women were also eating together, and the children were also eating together as well. The unity bowl apart from unifying the people also kept the women on alert, so as to cook delicious meals for their spouse or attract constructive criticism from other men in the family. Danquah (2008) asserted that, a weight cast in the shape of two crocodiles with two heads and two tails, but a single belly reminds citizens that although they are one people, conflict will never end among them. Even though the two crocodiles eat into the same belly they still fight for the food, because each wants to taste it. This psychologically prepares and heals people of possibilities of scuffle among themselves.

#### 4.3.2 The Golden Arch and Peace Pipe

The golden arch is a symbolic sword of peace among Ashanti's. The king used it to summon people who are fighting over a piece of land or whatever, telling them that we do not use weapons to solve problem but rather they should come to the palace for amicable solution. After settling the matter the king will asked them to smoke peace pipe. Peace pipe is a symbolic pipe used by the Ashanti king to confirm peaceful settlement of issues. The pipe is in two types, the golden pipe and the silver pipe.



After settling very hot dispute among members, the king will ask the two parties to smoke the pipe with tobacco as a symbol of understanding. The pipe is very long such that, when one is smoking the other party would be holding it, signifying that, they are together. The smoke that comes out signifies peace. They smoke from the silver pipe and the Ashantihene (the Ashanti king) also smoke from the golden pipe in other to serve as a witness that they would not go home and fight again. These artefacts helped the Ashanti people to restore peace among themselves and lived harmoniously.

#### **4.3.3 The Coward Sword**

Mr Brobbey, the director of Manhyia palace further unravels the mystery of coward sword. He said, in the history of Ashanti's, every man ought to go to war. Some men will go but will hide themselves while others will be fighting. Therefore, the king created a sword called "Coward sword" which he used to identify those cowards among them. While the battle is in progress, the king will choose some people to go on patrol with the sword in their hand, identifies the cowards and strike their foreheads with the sword. After the war, they will go house to house to identify those with the marks. If there is a king among them, the Asantehene, will then dethrone him and sack him from the community. Furthermore, if there is a married man among those identified cowards, the wife would be taken away from him and he will be banished to avoid giving birth to cowards. The Ashanti's used artefact in the form of coward sword to teach the members to be patriotic citizens in the Ashanti kingdom.

### **5.1 Findings, Conclusion and Recommendation**

The purpose of the study was to bring forth some of the therapeutic potencies in traditional Ashanti visual art forms. This task commenced with a review of related literature comprising all thematic areas that have direct or indirect bearing on the effective realization of the set objectives.

In the study, two forms of data were used. These were Primary data and secondary data.

The primary data were collected through Questionnaire and Interviews while the secondary data also dealt with the identification and analysis of the literary materials which were related to the subject matter. Instruments used were personal interviews thus responses from one on one interview with traditionalist, chiefs, elders, curator and a beneficiary of art therapy in Ashanti.

The first question of this research was 'to identify therapeutic potencies of traditional Ashanti ethnic visual art forms. In the process, the researcher identify some visual art forms like Akuaba doll, Pots, Beads, Body art among others that were traditionally proved to have possessed special powers to restore. The potencies were manifested in psychological, emotional and mythical means.

The second objective of the research 'is to investigate how proper documentations could enhance Ashanti Visual Art forms used for therapeutic purposes. The study proves that, there was no proper documentation. Lack of proper documentation had allowed acculturation to have its way of tinting the purity of traditional way of using art for restoration among Ashanti's of Ghana. This has made accessibility sometimes difficult and in a way linked it to fetishism.

The major findings to substantiate this research questions are as follows; the pot used by Ashanti's for restoration is symbolic, the pot psychologically is used to welcome good fortunes. Motherliness requires a woman to provide, by way of preparation, adequate food and shelter for own children and when necessary, for those of others and strangers as well. In Ashanti region, deceased woman who is known to have been benevolent is bewailed as: "the woman who gives to both mother and child", A cooking Pot which mystically serve as Grandmother, is used to entertains strangers. The pot is placed on mighty tree with big branch laden with fruits. When children come to you, they find something to eat. The one whose house is always filled with food always welcome children both in physical and spiritual realm. Akuaba doll was used to serve different functions so far as restorations in Ashanti traditional societies are concerned. Akuaba as "fertility" symbol, Akuaba as "beauty" symbol, Akuaba as "children's doll". Akuaba varies in form especially when it is made to be a fertility doll. The form is determined by the wishes of the father who makes it. Father who wishes to have a female child carve Akuababere (a doll with indication of all the characteristics of a girl, this always has the oval or egg shaped head). A male child is represented with a rectangular head and named Akuabanini while a religious and wise child is shown with a circular head and called Akuabatene. Akuaba as a fertility symbol is



generally made by a husband for his barren wife. She bore it, played about with it in the day time, and slept with it in the night. She did all through her life, till she got a child, or else buried with it, when she died.

Unity bowl is a symbolic bowl which the Ashanti's used as a unifier. It is irrefutable fact that "fufu" is the most stable food for the Ashanti's. Therefore, during the evening meals, assuming four (4) people were living in the same house, they will eat from the same bowl. The three heads on the bowl represents those eating together symbolically. It is called two or three heads are better than one. So that after eating or enjoying the food, if any one of them has any problem or challenges in their marriage, the person will bring it and the rest will help him to solve the problem. Also for instance, if four (4) people are eating together and one of them decides not to eat with the group or the group decide not to eat with him it means, he either has a problem with the group or vice versa. Under this circumstance, the elders will call them for amicable settlement. That was a nice way of using artefact to identify and solve problem among the Ashanti's. This enforces togetherness among the Ashanti people. The men were eating together in the bowl, the women were also eating together, and the children were also eating together as well. The unity bowl apart from unifying the people also kept the women on alert, so as to cook delicious meals for their spouse or attract constructive criticism from other men in the family. This in effect brought about competitive cooking skills and the delight of seeing gathered men enjoying their food which intend invites inner psychological enjoyment.

Golden arch is a symbolic sword of peace for Ashanti's. It was used to summon two parties with scuffle to Otumfo (Ashanti king) for amicable settlement. Peace pipe was also used by Ashanti's as a symbol to fortify the peace discovered among brothers and as the same time serving as witness symbol to guide against the recurring of the same incident in the society. The peace pipe is used as symbol to restore peace among the Ashanti's.

Coward Sword was used to identify cowards among Ashanti men and disciplined them to serve as deterrent to others which would make them patriotic. In the history of Ashanti's, every man ought to go to war. Some men will go but will hide themselves while others will be fighting. Therefore, the king created a sword called "Coward sword" which he used to identify those cowards among them. While the battle is in progress, the king will choose some people to go on patrol with the sword in their hand, identifies the cowards and strike their foreheads with the sword. After the war, they will go house to house to identify those with the marks. If there is a king among them, the Asantehene, will then dethrone him and sack him from the community. Furthermore, if there is a married man among those identified cowards, the wife would be taken away from him and he will be banished to avoid giving birth to cowards. The Ashanti's used artefact in the form of coward sword to teach the members to be patriotic citizens in the Ashanti kingdom.

## 5.2 Conclusions

The study has unravelled that traditionally, art therapy in Ashanti culture to a large extent reveals their cultural identity. Even though acculturation has brought about certain changes in the beliefs and usage of arts among Ashanti's, they have not been completely eradicated. With this in view, some of the indigenous and culturally beneficial art therapy should be retained while at the same time paving ways for change to suit modern conditions. It is also interesting to note that the art therapy of Asantes is to a large extent linked to fetishism but the study prove that it was due to ignorant among the people. To help the present and future generations come to terms with their true identity, every effort ought to be made to restore the use of art for restoration (art therapy) for the betterment of the Ashanti peoples. The study discovered the following.

- ✓ The study identified traditional Ashanti visual art forms like Akuaba doll, pot, coward sword, unity bowl, beads, body arts, peace pipe and the golden arch to have potencies in a form of psychological, emotional, and mythical means for restoration among Ashanti's.
- ✓ There were no proper documentations of these visual art forms of Ashanti's in terms of its curative purposes.
- ✓ Akuaba doll was used as fertility and beauty symbols among the Ashanti's of Ghana.
- ✓ Traditional pot was used to welcome good fortunes when place in front of houses. Unity bowl was used as unifier symbols among the Ashanti's of Ghana.
- ✓ The study discovered that, Golden arch and Peace pipe were used to restore and maintain peace among the Ashanti peoples.

### 5.3 Recommendations

This study has discovered that some traditional Ashanti Visual Art forms like Akuaba doll, pots, unity bowl, coward sword, Golden arch and peace pipe have potencies for restoration. The study therefore recommends that, in writing of art text books, the inclusion of Ghana's artistic therapeutic potencies be included to enrich our repertoire of art historic knowledge.

The study further unravelled that, there were no proper documentation, therefore, art students and writers may be encouraged to embark on further research into the identification and proper documentations of therapeutic potencies of traditional Ashanti art form and further spread it to other ethnic groups in the country for easy identification and accessibility.

The review of related literature and the data analysed from the field showed that art therapy was used to render Ashanti women fertile and also helped gave them beautiful and wise children. Unity bowl was used as symbol of unifier among Asantes, golden arch and peace pipe among others had been effectively used to restore various disputes since time immemorial among Ashanti's. Therefore, the study further recommend that, art therapy should be encouraged and train professional art therapist who will use art effectively to administer restoration. This aspect of curative measures can be added to our existing health institutions for accessibility.

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